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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

109

The Flying Dutchman

Fairies, demons and aliens

White symbols-black arts?

Who was Robin Hood?

The crab, the lion and the virgin

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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Contents

Fairies, demons and aliens
MASTERS OF DISGUISE 2161
'The little people', demons and alien visitations show disturbing similarities. We investigate
Hilary Evans

Robin Hood
WHO WAS ROBIN HOOD? 2166
Folklore tells of several 'Robin Hoods' – but who was *the* legendary hero? And why was he an outlaw?
Brian Innes

Flying Dutchman
PHANTOM OF THE HIGH SEAS 2170
A ghostly ship, captained by the spirit of the sailor who sold his soul to the Devil – fact or fiction?
Paul Begg

Origins of the zodiac
THE CRAB, THE LION AND THE VIRGIN 2174
The signs of Cancer, Leo and Virgo are revealed to have far subtler shades of meaning than most people imagine
Frederick Goodman

Trulli of Alberobello
WHITE SYMBOLS – BLACK ARTS? 2178
The painted symbols on the strange Italian towers may be not only secret, but deeply sinister . . .
Frederick Goodman

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In next week's issue

Her father attempted to rape her when she was ten – and as an adult Ruth was literally stalked by him in the form of an hallucination so real that she could walk round 'him'. **Ruth and reality** is one woman's horror story – but its implications affect us all. Continuing **Fairies, demons and aliens** we explore the idea that today's aliens are yesterday's fairies. Sudden deaths, mysterious accidents and inexplicably lingering illnesses have struck the inhabitants of one Dorset village since the early 1970s. In the **Fishpond enigma** we look at the controversy that continues to rage over the cause of these misfortunes. Ancient symbols carved on moorland outcrops are analysed in **Ilkley rocks**. And what exactly did the victims in the **Cash-Landrum case** witness – an extra-terrestrial craft, or a US secret weapon?

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The Virgin Mary, little winged fairies, an evil demon and an extra-terrestrial being – what do these entities have in common? HILARY EVANS analyses the many meanings of visionary visitations to humans

Masters of disguise

ON SUNDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 1858, a 14-year-old French country girl, Bernadette Soubirous, returned on impulse to the grotto outside the little town of Lourdes where, three days earlier, she had had an extraordinary experience: a vision of a beautiful young lady. She hoped to see the vision again.

Her hope was justified and the figure did indeed reappear, though the friends she was with saw nothing. Suddenly, Bernadette began to throw holy water at the figure till the phial she had brought was empty.

Bernadette Soubirous sees the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in one of the most celebrated of religious visions. But religion has no monopoly on visitations by supernatural beings, reports of which are as frequent in the 20th century as in days of old

The authenticity of Bernadette's vision that day and afterwards is accepted by millions, who might consider that sceptical action on her part almost sacrilegious. But of all the incidents in the story of Lourdes, it is perhaps the most revealing, as to both the attitude of the witness and the identity of the figure she saw.

The fact that Bernadette deliberately took holy water with her on her second visit to the grotto tells us that, although sure that her vision had been real, she was ready to face the possibility that it was diabolical in character. Had this been the case, the vision would have vanished then and there, for tradition says that demons cannot bear holy water. When the figure stood its ground, Bernadette was convinced that it was truly a divine vision. Nor was it offended by Bernadette's suspicion: it smiled at her, nodding, as though it fully understood that Bernadette, as a good Catholic, had to make the test; for the powers of evil were said to be capable of masquerading as sacred visions.

It is clear that to this country girl of the 19th century, the existence of blessed visions and demonic apparitions was a living reality. And the precautions she took to protect herself were down-to-earth and practical.

At the same time, the fact remains that Bernadette's vision manifested in a form ambiguous to her. Even after seeing the vision six times, Bernadette told a priest who suggested that it was the Virgin Mary, 'I don't know if it is her, she hasn't told me so.' Why was the vision so diffident about revealing its identity? Theologians skirt the issue by suggesting that the intention was to test the visionary's faith – but it is not easy to see why the faith of this French girl had to be tested over and over again. The behaviour of Bernadette's vision becomes comprehensible only when we look for its origin in Bernadette's own state of mind.

The belief that supernatural beings appear among us from time to time is to be found in every human culture, in every period. Religion is far from having a monopoly on such visitations, which are a common theme in folklore – and the reports are probably as frequent in our own day as they have ever been, in our sophisticated Western culture as among the most primitive ones. The diversity of the visitants is broad. There are those who share the Earth with us – the fairies and their kind. There are those who visit us from celestial or infernal regions – the angels and demons. And there are those who come from outer space – the extra-terrestrial aliens.

Within these broad categories there are innumerable variations. There is hardly a

region of the world that does not have a tradition of 'the little folk', and a world catalogue of fairies, gnomes, trolls and the like would rival that of beetles or butterflies. The French writer George Sand found that her country neighbours in the province of Berry accepted the existence of an amazingly rich assortment of supernatural creatures, some benevolent but most of them distinctly unfriendly to humans.

> I'll admit that speaking for myself, I've never seen a single one of these visions of the night. I've wandered the countryside at all hours of the night, either alone or with companions; but apart from a few inoffensive meteors, or some old trees glowing with phosphorescence, I have never encountered a single fantastic object. But that doesn't mean I dismiss these rustic reports as fabrications, or the results of fright. These things *exist*, these things *happen*, with at least as much reality as a reflection in a mirror.

Above: the elfin oak in Kensington Gardens, London. In England the name of elf is usually applied to small boy-fairies, but in Scotland elves are often of human size. Such 'little people' probably came to Britain from Scandinavia, where they were part of the ancient mythology

This raises the fundamental question: how real *are* these fairies, these demons, these aliens? Just as George Sand did not question the sincerity of her neighbours, just as millions of Christians accept the sincerity of Bernadette Soubirous, so we should not deny the good faith of the thousands of people throughout the world who are currently reporting encounters with extra-terrestrials.

Neither dreams nor fantasies

We may of course accept the *sincerity* of the reports while doubting the *reality* of the experiences giving rise to them. But even that does not mean we can dismiss them as 'all in the mind'. If we regard these entities as imaginary, we are faced with two questions. First, why do people imagine these specific entities and not others? And second, by what process do people come to believe that their imaginary experiences are neither dreams nor fantasies, but 'real'? That they do believe this, in defiance of probability, is beyond question. The following account appeared in *Fate* magazine in May 1977:

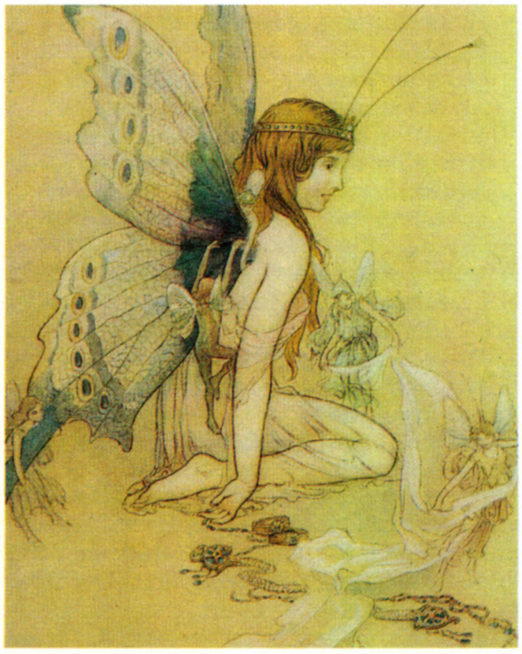
> I was in the garden with my mother at her home in Somerset. Suddenly Mother put a finger to her lips to indicate silence, and then pointed to one of the blooms. With astonishment I saw what she was seeing – a little figure about six inches [15 centimetres] high, in the perfect shape of a woman and with brilliantly coloured diaphanous wings resembling those of a dragonfly. The figure held a little wand and was pointing it at the heart of a rose. At the tip of the wand was a little light, like a star. The figure's limbs were a very pale pink and visible through her clothes. She had long silvery hair which resembled an aura. She hovered near the rose for at least two minutes, her wings

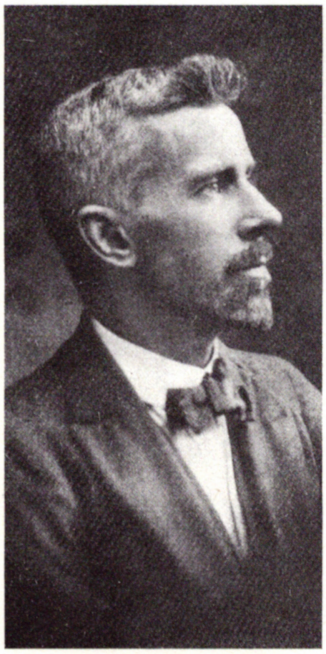
Right: Billy Graham, the American evangelist who travels the world with his message of salvation. Such religious fundamentalists as he believe in the literal existence of angels – and demons – all around us

Below: Arthur Rackham's illustration for the ballad of Clerk Colvill, who was lured away by a fairy. Many types of supernatural creature are said to trap and mislead humans into danger – and sometimes even to death

Bottom: the typical 'story-book' fairy – beautiful and dainty with marvellous diaphanous wings

Bottom right: Edward L. Gardner, a Theosophist and writer on fairies. He was involved in the notorious Cottingley fairy case with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle





> vibrating rapidly, like those of a hummingbird, and then she disappeared. . . .Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the experience was the way in which the little creature corresponded in practically every detail to the archetypal fairy of folklore and fairy stories.

Cynthia Montefiore, the witness, does not question for a moment the reality of her experience, which was confirmed by her mother. And she herself asks why the creature was so disconcertingly like a 'picture-book' fairy. Even if we decide that these entities are real, they would have to be of a different kind of reality from the one we are used to. For these creatures seem able to transcend the accepted laws of our everyday reality. They can appear and disappear at will, they can change shape, they are capable of all kinds of magical and miraculous acts. Because they perform feats of which we mortals are not capable, there is a tendency to think of these beings as superior to ourselves – even though the things they do are frequently bizarre or banal.

And there always seems to be a place for these mysterious entities in the scheme of things. Bernadette Soubirous's action in throwing holy water at her vision was the result of centuries of doctrinal speculation, in the course of which a place was found for visions demonic or divine, and appropriate attitudes and actions were prescribed. Before she ever saw her vision, Bernadette knew what to expect and what to do.

Such doctrinal attitudes are still prevalent today. The American evangelist Billy Graham, for example, believes that angels exist, as a literal fact, all around us. Religious fundamentalists are seemingly well-informed as to the powers, purposes and practices of demons: John Weldon and Clifford Wilson, in their book *Close encounters, a better explanation* (1978), warn us: 'We should note that demons do have control over electro-magnetic phenomena, and they could easily send communications to scientists the world over if they wanted to.' The authors can hardly have obtained this scrap of information from the Bible: but what other authority can they have?

Edward L. Gardner, author of a book on fairies that was published by the Theosophists in 1945 and reprinted in 1974, was involved in the controversial affair of the Cottingley fairies (see page 381). He took the common-sense view that, because fairies can be photographed, they must of necessity be physical; but he added that, 'within our physical octave there are degrees of density that elude ordinary vision.' Gardner's ideas, which are coherent and intellectually plausible, were quoted at length by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his book *The coming of the fairies* (1922):

> Fairies use bodies that we should describe, in non-technical language, as of a lighter-than-gaseous nature, but we should be entirely wrong if we thought them in consequence insubstantial. In their own way they are as real as we are.
>
> Fairies are not born and do not die as we do. . . .The diminutive human form, so widely assumed, is doubtless due, at least in a great measure, to the powerful influence of human thought, the strongest creative power in our cycle.

Small expectations

That is to say, fairies are small because they adapt themselves to our ideas, and those who see them *expect* them to be small. According to Gardner:

> The normal working body of the gnome and fairy is not of human nor of any other definite form, and herein lies the explanation of much that has been puzzling concerning the nature-spirit kingdom generally. They have no clear-cut shape normally, and one can only describe them as small, hazy, and somewhat luminous clouds of colour with a brighter spark-like nucleus.

In adopting a particular form, 'they appear to be influenced from two directions – the physical outer conditions prevailing, and an inner intelligent urge.' Having decided on a shape, the entities have no difficulty in adopting it:

> Each nature spirit appears to possess at least a temporary definite individuality at times, and to rejoice in it. The diminutive human form – sometimes grotesque, as in the case of brownie or gnome, sometimes beautifully graceful, as in the surface-fairy variety – if conditions allow, is assumed in a flash.
>
> What determines the shape assumed, and how the transformation is effected, is not clear. One may speculate as to the influence of human

The invisible crowd

A tiny winged female of great daintiness, a homely little fellow in shabby brown, golden-haired girls and rosy-cheeked boys, wizened old men and women of diminutive size – here comes the parade of the 'little people'. But these are only a few of the myriad crowd belonging to that race of supernatural creatures who have peopled the Earth along with humans for centuries. They are commonly grouped together as 'fairies'.

Some are so tiny that they can make a bed in a flower; others are about 3 feet (1 metre) tall, or of human size, or gigantic. Some are so beautiful that they can enchant the beholder; others are so hideous that they are horribly frightening. Some are helpful and benevolent; others are harmful and spiteful. They are called the 'wee folk' or 'good people' in

thought, individual or in the mass, and quite probably the explanation when found will include this influence as a factor.

'The influence of human thought' would be a primary factor in any explanation except that of the fundamentalist theologian and that of the no less doctrinaire occultist who, like the Church, believes in the literal existence of good and evil spirits. But Gardner was perceptive when he added the words 'individual or in the mass' for, as we shall see, the hypothesis that sightings of fairies are all in the mind may relate to something *shared* rather than to the imagination of the individual witness.

The Theosophists are not alone in suggesting that the entity seen is some kind of amorphous elemental, capable of assuming whatever shape it chooses. The American ufologist John Keel has advanced a similar hypothesis:

> This nucleate phenomenon has always existed on this planet and has taken many forms. Some of the Unbelievables . . . may have been transmogrifications or disguises for the central phenomenon. They materialise when lightning courses across the sky or certain magnetic conditions prevail. They are not real or physical in the usual sense, but they are real enough while they last. They are paraphysical and can assume the forms of one-eyed giants stepping out of magnificent flying machines, or long-fingered Orientals driving around in black Cadillacs which can melt into the air. Their shennanigans over the past several thousand years have spawned many of our religious and occult beliefs. In trying to record their activities, we have built up a literature based upon nonsensical manipulations and induced hallucinations.

George Sand, the famous French novelist, who retained her love of the countryside through all her wild life in Paris. She respected her country neighbours' belief in fairy folk though she never saw any of them herself

Shapeless but intelligent elementals capable of taking on a specific shape in response to the ideas in our minds – could this be the basic factor in all our sightings of fairies, our visions of demons, our encounters with aliens?

A dangerous position

A German woman wrote an account of her experience while climbing in the Bavarian Alps in the 1950s:

> You will understand that this is a rather heavy mountain tour, but there is a good way up as well as down: however, one must not miss it, as I did. Having started a little late for the return, and light beginning to fade, all of a sudden I found myself in a really dangerous position. As a matter of fact one year later a young girl fell to death exactly on the spot where I realised [myself] to be in an almost hopeless position. All of a sudden I noticed a sort of a big ball of light, and this condensed to the shape of a tall, rather Chinese looking gentleman. Extraordinarily, I was not a bit frightened, and also not astonished: it all seemed at the time quite natural to me. The gentleman bowed, spoke a few words, led me . . . to the tourists' way, and disappeared as a ball of light.

Balls of light have been reported in a great many curious incidents (see pages 218 and 1603). As fireballs or ball lightning they are an elusive but generally recognised natural phenomenon. But many have observed what looks strangely like the suggestion of a degree of intelligence.

The Welsh lights that appeared during

Ireland, the 'small people' in Cornwall, the 'li'l fallas' in the Isle of Man, the 'good neighbours' in Scotland.

The fairies most people think of tend to be winged and to look like very little humans of pretty face and figure, dressed in fine filmy clothes. They are believed to be happy creatures who dance gracefully through the air.

Brownies are small men of about 3 feet (1 metre) in height with shaggy heads and brownish faces, dressed in ragged brown clothes. They are good-humoured and kindly disposed towards humans, coming out at night to help hard-put farmers get their unfinished work done. But among the brownie species are also lobs, hobs or hobgoblins and pucks or Robin Goodfellows – who are practical jokers and might tease as much as help – and will o' the wisps, who can lure a lonely traveller off the path and into trouble.

Leprechauns are the fairy shoemakers who live in Ireland and have come to represent all Irish fairies. They are cheerful little menfolk dressed in green and wearing leather aprons and buckled shoes. They are usually helpful to humans, but are also known to be mischievous.

The pixies of Somerset, pigsies of Devon and piskies of Cornwall are generally red-headed and have pointed ears and turned-up noses. They help their favourites among humans but, like the will o' the wisp (far left), make a game of misleading travellers.

Gnomes, silkies, goblins, boggarts, knockers, derricks, greenies, killmoulis – these are others of the fairy folk, coming in all sizes, all degrees of beauty or ugliness, all types of character. They are the 'little people' – part of a deep-seated folklore that has endured for thousands of years.

the height of the ministry of Mary Jones indicate intelligent guidance from some source (see page 750). That source may, of course, have been the mind of Mary Jones herself, and so likewise with the German climber. We may theorise that there was no external factor involved in any of these cases. But how far can we stretch this theory?

In the summer of 1953 a Mr and Mrs Hight were prospecting for uranium in the desert country of New Mexico, USA. Mr Hight had gone off on a week-long exploration trip, leaving Mrs Hight in a cabin. During his absence she became very ill and felt herself on the verge of death.

> As I lay there one afternoon wondering what would become of me, a small light appeared in one corner of the cabin. It grew in size, and within moments expanded into a large glowing light. It moved slowly towards me, changing from a solid ball into a geometric wheel which whirled through my body, leaving a wonderfully clean and refreshed sensation. I felt a surge of vitality and well-being. I arose and realised the light had completely restored my health.

Health-restoring wheels seem a world away from friendly fairies, threatening demons and visiting aliens of both characters. But perhaps the luminous wheel symbolised for Mrs Hight what the Oriental gentleman did for the German woman and the Virgin Mary for Bernadette Soubirous. By looking more closely at what these apparitions mean to those who see them, we may gain further insight into the nature of the entity phenomenon.

Are space-age aliens the modern equivalent of the fairies of old? See page 2186

A towering peak in the Bavarian Alps where, in the 1950s, a woman climber was helped to safety by a mysterious entity who first appeared as a ball of light. Apparitions of this kind raise the question of whether they have a degree of intelligence – or whether their behaviour reflects what is in the mind of the person seeing them

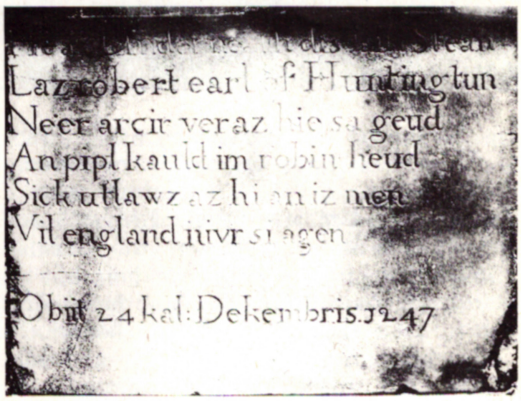
Who was Robin Hood?

Medieval manuscripts and broadsheet ballads – and epic movies – testify to the lasting popularity of the Robin Hood story. BRIAN INNES attempts to disentangle the real Robin Hood from the wealth of legend that surrounds him

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY ATTEMPTS to identify the legendary figure of Robin Hood with a variety of supernatural creatures – the Norse God Wodin, the Scandinavian deity Hoder, or the Teutonic elf Hodeken. And there have been suggestions that he is a folk hero, derived from some ancient Saxon god and adopted by the indigenous English population as a focus of defiance against the occupying Normans. These ideas, however, are of fairly recent origin: for most of the past five and a half centuries Robin Hood was regarded as an historic figure. The question is: with what recorded person can he be identified – and why was he an outlaw?

The most persistent theory concerning Robin Hood's identity is given flesh in a relatively late ballad, probably composed in the mid 18th century; and entitled *Robin Hood's death and burial: shewing how he was taken ill, and how he went to his cousin at Kirkley Hall, who let him blood, which was the cause of his death.* The ballad ends by purporting to quote the epitaph on Robin Hood's grave near the priory at Kirklees in Yorkshire:

Robin Hood, weak from lack of blood, shoots his last arrow, in this Victorian stained glass window (below). Tradition has it that he is buried where the arrow landed, and there is indeed a gravestone nearby (below right) – dating only from the 19th century



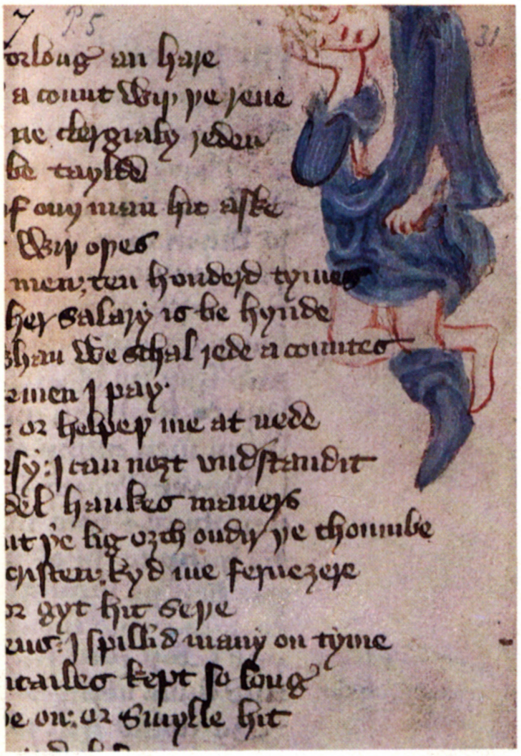
Robert Earl of Huntingdon
Lies under this little stone
No archer was like him so good
His wildness nam'd him Robin Hood;
Full thirteen years, and something more,
These northern parts he vexed sore
Such out-laws as he and his men
May England never know again.

The source of this verse is a document that the 18th-century antiquary William Stukeley claimed to have found in the papers of an earlier researcher, Thomas Gale, who was Dean of York from 1697 to 1702:

Hear undernead dis laitl stean
Laiz robert earl of Huntingtun
Near arcir ves as hie sa geud
And pipl kauld im robin heud
Sick outlawz az hi an iz man
Vil england nivr si agen

Whatever the provenance of this document, it is clearly a forgery; scholars agree that the language and curious pseudo-archaic spelling have no resemblance to anything else to be found in any English dialect. At some point in the last century, some enthusiast caused a stone engraved with the verses to be placed near Kirklees; the verse, however, is certainly not of the 13th century.

Nevertheless, the theory has persisted that Robin was the Earl of Huntingdon;



This illustration from a 1427 manuscript version of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (*c.*1380) shows the character Sloth asleep, his tunic falling loosely around him, one leg bare, the other with the hose rolled down. The story of Robin Hood was already well enough known by the late 14th century for Langland to have Sloth say 'I could not perfectly my Paternoster say as the Priest it singeth/But I know rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolph Earl of Chester'

Richard Grafton, writing in 1569, quoted 'an olde and auncient pamphlet' for his dating of Robin Hood's career, and an anonymous manuscript in the British Museum, dating from the late 16th century, gives an almost identical account. Stukeley believed that he had identified Robin with Robert Fitzooth, an entirely fictional lateral descendant, with the heirs of Huntingdon, from Richard Fitzgilbert, one of William the Conqueror's knights. A 19th-century writer compounded the theory further by suggesting that the name Sir Richard at the Lea (or Simon of the Lee), which was one of the titles adopted by Robin in the later ballads, was derived from a family named de St Lys, who held Huntingdon Castle for a period.

What makes all these theories particularly suspect, however, is that the early ballads unequivocally identify Robin as a yeoman, not as a member of the aristocracy.

During the 19th century the scattered records of 800 years of British history were gathered together and catalogued by the Historic Documents Commission, making it possible for the first time for scholars to read through them in an orderly manner and put history into a proper perspective. In 1852 the famous antiquary Joseph Hunter claimed that he had uncovered evidence that identified a real Robin Hood, and nearly a century later the work was followed up and developed by J.W. Walker of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society. It makes, on the face of it, a singularly convincing story.

Between the years 1285 and 1295, a boy christened Robert was born in the town of Wakefield in Yorkshire. His father was probably Adam Hood, a forester in the service of the Earl de Warenne; the name of Adam Hood appears regularly in the Manor Court Rolls between 1274 and 1314. On 25 January 1316 Robert Hood and his wife Matilda gave two shillings for leave to take one piece of the lord's waste ground on 'Bickhill' (or Bitchhill) in Wakefield, between the houses of Philip Damyson and Thomas Alayn, this land being 30 feet (10 metres) long and 16 feet (5 metres) wide 'to hold to the aforesaid Robert and Matilda and their heirs rendering yearly sixpence at the three terms of the year to the lord'. The Manor Court Roll for 1357

Then away they went from merry with hey down, &c. (Sherwood and into Yorkshire he did hye,
And the King did follow, with a hoop and a
If it please your Grace, I am come to this for to speak with King Henry; (place,
Queen Katherine she answer'd bold Robin with hey, &c. (again,

This 17th-century broadsheet places Robin Hood firmly in the reign of King Henry VIII (1509–1547): 'If it please your grace, I am come to this place for to speak with King Henry;/Queen Katherine she answered bold Robin again'. With such confusion rife in the legends, the historian has a difficult task in trying to trace Robin Hood's true identity

shows a house, 'formerly the property of Robert Hode', on this site.

Toward the end of 1316, the Earl de Warenne was ordered by King Edward II to raise a troop of foot soldiers to fight the Scots; and Robert Hood's name appears among those fined for not obeying the Earl's summons.

A second muster was called by the Earl de Warenne in 1317. This time Robert Hood's name did not appear among the list of those fined – and Walker, with justification, suggests that this is evidence that he answered the summons. In 1322 Lancaster raised an army of 2000 foot to fight against the King. Although there are no surviving records of those who fought at Boroughbridge, the name of Robert Hood is again not among those fined.

Confiscated property

Assuming, then, that Robert was among the army defeated by the King's men at Boroughbridge in 1322, Walker goes on to claim that 'a building of five rooms of new construction on Bichhill, Wakefield' – which he identifies with the building listed in the Manor Court Rolls of 1316 – was included in a list of property confiscated from men who had been declared outlaws.

If this is true, it is a convincing case indeed – for here we have a Robert, or Robin, Hood, who was among those made outlaw in 1322. Where could he take refuge? Where else but in the nearby forest of Barnsdale? This was a large tract of land in the southern part of the West Riding; at its southern end it adjoined Sherwood forest, which extended to the outskirts of Nottingham. And it is in Barnsdale that the earliest Robin Hood ballads are set.

However, it appears that Walker made this leap in his argument on the basis of a misreading of the Latin text. In his book *Robin Hood*, Professor J.C. Holt points out that the 'building of five rooms' should be read as 'five stalls', and that there is no evidence that these comprised confiscated property.

On the other hand, Professor Holt's researches have uncovered a further manuscript that lends weight to the next stage of the theory. In the spring of 1323, Edward II made a progress through the north of England, leaving Westminster on 18 April, reaching Newark on 29 April, and arriving in York on 1 May. From 16 to 21 May he stayed at Rothwell, between Wakefield and Leeds, and spent three days hunting in Plumpton Park, part of the forest of Knaresborough. As the *Lytell Geste* puts it:

Robin Hood as he appears on the screen. Richard Green (right) starred as Robin in *Sword of Sherwood Forest*, made in 1961. And Errol Flynn played opposite Olivia De Havilland (below) in a swashbuckling movie of 1938 – 'in the full glory of Technicolor!' – entitled *The adventures of Robin Hood*

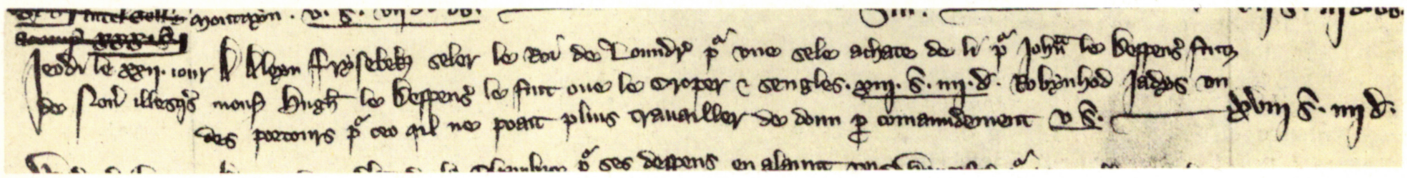
All the passe of Lancasshyre
He went both ferre and nere
Tyll he came to Plomton Park
He faylyd many of his dere.

There our kynge was wont to se
Herdës many one
He could unneth fynde one dere
That bare ony good horne.

The kynge was wonder wroth withall
And swore by the Trynyte
'I wolde I had Robyn Hode
'With eyen I myght hym se.'

So one of the King's foresters suggested a clever plan: the King and five of his knights should disguise themselves as an abbot and his monks, and ride through the greenwood. Robin would be sure to stop them, and then they might see the great outlaw with their own eyes. So it fell out – and everybody knows the tale of how Robin recognised his King, was forgiven and was taken to London with the royal household.

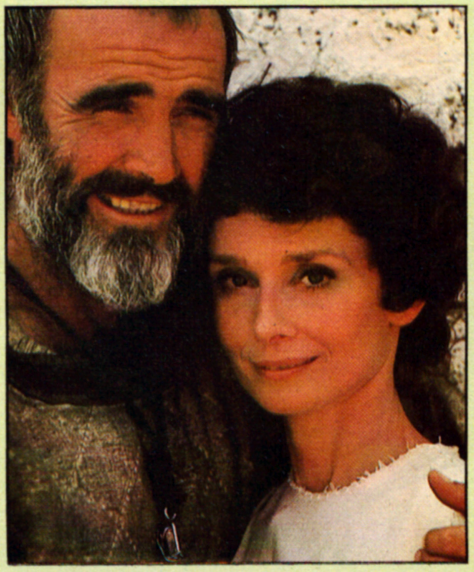
If this were based upon true events, Robin would have been made a *vadlet*, one of those who stood, not beside the throne, but at the door of the king's chamber – which is why they were also known as *porteurs*. The King remained in Nottingham until 24 November, spent Christmas at Kenilworth and, travelling a roundabout route through Gloucester and Bristol, returned to Westminster on 27



Below: an entry on the accounts of the royal household for 22 November 1324. It reads: 'By command of the king, given to Robyn Hod, formerly one of the *porteurs*, because he can no longer work here, the sum of five shillings'

Maid Marian takes a bow

Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn star as Robin and Maid Marian in the 1976 film *Robin and Marian*



The figure of Maid Marian, living in jolly comradeship with the outlaws of the greenwood, is almost as much a part of the Robin Hood legend as Robin himself. And yet she is not a part of the early tradition; women are, indeed, almost entirely absent from the early medieval ballads about Robin.

Maid Marian was almost certainly 'borrowed' from a dramatic pastoral poem entitled the *Jeu de Robin et Marion* ('The play of Robin and Marion'), which was written around 1285 by Adam de la Halle. During the 16th century, the ballads began to be associated with the May Day rituals – and scholars believe that the Marian from the de la Halle poem became associated with some ancient fertility goddess; her partnership with Robin was perhaps suggested by his link with the greenwood, and therefore with the world of magic and the supernatural (see page 2132). If it is true that Marian originated as a fertility figure, it is very strange that the legend shows her as a chaste, almost Girl-Guide-like character; in one scene Marian, disguised as a page, even manages to be locked in armed combat with her lover for an entire hour before they recognise one another.

February 1324.

Joseph Hunter discovered that the royal household accounts for 25 April 1324 record payments of the past month's wages to Robyn Hod and 28 others; and from this date until November the name of Robyn Hod occurs regularly in the accounts. But Professor Holt has discovered a fragment of a household account for June 1323; the writing is extremely faint, but it can be deciphered under ultraviolet light, and it records the payment of wages to Robyn Hod for the very month, if we may believe the *Lytell Geste*, in which Robin was first taken into the King's service.

The tale of Robin Hood then tells us that after a year and some months he asked permission from the King to leave the court and return to Barnsdale. In the household accounts for 22 November 1324 there is the entry: '*Robyn Hod jadis un des porteurs por cas qil ne poait plus travailler de donn par commandement, vs.*'

According to the *Lytell Geste*, Robin lived in Barnsdale for many years; but one day he fell ill, and needed to be let blood. So he went to his cousin, the prioress of Kirklees; but she opened a vein in his arm and let him bleed to death.

Early in the 17th century, it was reported that 'at Kirklees nunnery Robin Hood's tombe with a plain cross on a flat stone is shown in the cemetery'; in 1665 Dr Nathaniel Johnstone made a drawing of the stone; in 1715 Thoresby wrote of 'a gravestone that yet remains, but the inscription scarce legible'; and Gough's *Sepulchral monuments* reproduces an engraving of the tombstone 'now broken and much defaced'. During the early 19th century it was broken up by navvies building a railway nearby, who used chips of the stone as a cure for toothache.

In 1706 the grave of the prioress was discovered among the ruins of Kirklees. The stone was similar to the one described as being that of Robin Hood, and round the outside edge ran the inscription:

DOUCE:JHV:DE:NAZARETH:FILS:DIEU:
AYEZ:MERCI:A:ELIZABETH:STAINTON:
PRIORES:DE:CEST:MAISON

'Sweet Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, have pity upon Elizabeth Stainton, Prioress of this house.'

So much circumstantial evidence can prove very persuasive, but there are many other candidates for the role of *real* Robin Hood. There is Robert Hood of Cirencester, who killed a man named Ralph in the abbot's garden some time between 1213 and 1216; there is a Robin Hood who was in prison in 1354 for offences committed in the forest of Rockingham. And Professor Holt has his own favourite: Robert Hode, a tenant of the archbishopric of York, who fled from the jurisdiction of the King's judges in 1225. 'That is all that is known of him' says Professor Holt; '. . . Only one thing is certain . . . he was an outlaw.'

There let us say farewell to Robin Hood, man or myth, among the leaves so green. In the words of the ballad *Robin Hood and the potter*, which was first recorded in a manuscript of the late 15th century:

Thus parted Robyn, the sheriff and
the potter,
Underneath the greenwood tree;
God have mercy on Robyn Hood's soul
And save all good yeomanry!

Further reading

R.B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, Heinemann 1976
J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood*, Thames and Hudson 1982
J. Hunter, *Robin Hood, his period, real character, etc.*, J.R. Smith 1852

Phantom of the high seas

A ship runs into a terrible storm. But the demented captain, deaf to all entreaties, refuses to seek shelter – and, as punishment, is condemned to sail the seas for eternity. PAUL BEGG examines the famous legend of the Flying Dutchman, and seeks its origins

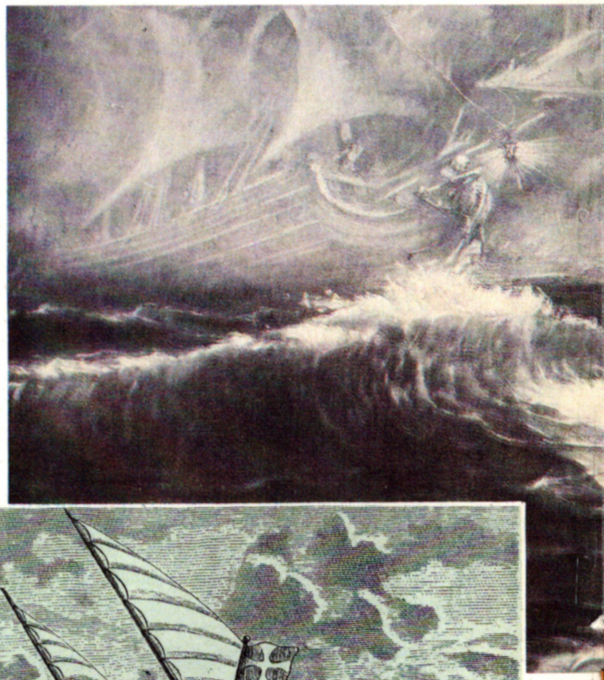
THE STORY OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN is one of the most famous and perhaps one of the oldest legends of the sea, having been in circulation for at least 500 years and possibly having its origin well before the birth of Christ. Essentially, the story is this: a maniacal Dutch sea captain – the term 'Flying Dutchman' actually refers to the captain, not his ship – challenges the wrath of God and as a result is condemned to sail the ocean for eternity, bringing death to all who sight his spectral ship. This tale has been elaborated upon by many writers – but it is more than a piece of fiction, a sinister tale of the sea with which to frighten credulous landlubbers in waterfront bars. The phantom ship has been seen many times – and there have even been reports in the 20th century.

Many authorities have argued that the story of the Flying Dutchman has its origin in a real event, though there is very little agreement about what that event was. The issue is further confused by the fact that there are many versions of the tale – in which the ship's skipper is variously named Vanderdecken, Van Demien, Van Straaten, or Van something else.

Perhaps the best-known version of the Flying Dutchman story tells of a Captain Vanderdecken who was making a voyage around the Cape of Good Hope when his ship was engulfed by a howling storm. The passengers were terrified and pleaded with Vanderdecken to find a safe port, or at least shorten sail and attempt to ride out the storm, but the demented skipper laughed at their pleas and, lashing himself to the wheel, began to sing blasphemous songs.

The crew were also alarmed by the behaviour of their captain and tried to take control of the ship, but the attempted mutiny was quelled when Vanderdecken hurled the ringleader overboard, leaving the terrified passengers and crew to throw themselves on the mercy of God. In answer to their prayers, the storm clouds parted and an incandescent light bathed the forecastle revealing a glorious figure who some said was the Holy Ghost, while others claimed he was God.

The figure confronted Vanderdecken and told him that since he delighted in the torment of others he would henceforth be



Above: an engraving showing the first English production, in 1876, of Richard Wagner's opera *Der fliegende Holländer* ('The flying Dutchman'). The work is based on the familiar story of a Dutch sea captain who is condemned to sail the seas forever – in a ghostly ship that brings death to all who look upon her. Wagner's version allows the captain to be redeemed by the love of a faithful woman – but the opera ends with them both dying

Below: the spectre of the Flying Dutchman's ship appears to a group of shipwrecked sailors, in this anonymous illustration after an original by Hermann Hendrich. A sighting of a ghostly ship, identified as the Flying Dutchman's, was reported in 1881 by George, Prince of Wales (later to become George V) and his elder brother Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence (right). On 11 June at 4 a.m., so a record compiled from the boys' private journals, letters and notebooks tells, a strange and ghostly ship, lit by a weird red glow, crossed their bows. Thirteen crew members on the princes' ship saw the spectral vessel – and two other ships of the fleet flashed signals to ask whether any other vessels had seen the strange glow

condemned to sail the ocean for eternity, forever in the grip of a storm, and that he would bring doom to all who sighted him; red-hot iron would be his only food, gall his only drink, and his only company would be the cabin-boy, who would grow horns from his head, have the muzzle of a tiger and the skin of a dogfish – all of which seems very unfair to the poor cabin-boy, who had hitherto played no independent part in the story and presumably had been as afraid of Vanderdecken as had the rest of the crew. However, with these words the vision disappeared and with him all the passengers and crew. Vanderdecken and the unfortunate cabin-boy were left to their fate.

Left: the Portuguese explorer Bartholomes Diaz on his voyage to discover the Cape of Good Hope in 1487. Some authorities have suggested that the story of the Flying Dutchman is based on the character of Diaz, whose exploits and fame as a navigator assumed legendary proportions

This is the time-honoured story of the Flying Dutchman. It may have a foundation in fact but there is little agreement about what that fact may be. One suggestion is that the tale is derived from the Norse saga of Stote, a Viking who stole a ring from the gods and was later found as a skeleton in a robe of fire seated on the mainmast of a black spectral ship. Other authorities believe that the story is more recent and suggest that it dates from the adventures of Bartholomes Diaz (*c.* 1450–1500), the Portuguese navigator who discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 and whose prowess as a skipper assumed a superhuman quality in his biography by Luis de Camois.

Playing dice with the Devil

Other researchers have unearthed a tenuous story about two Dutch merchantmen in the 1500s whose crews sighted the wraith of a vessel they knew to have been lost in the Pacific, and that the Flying Dutchman story evolved from this. Another theory is that the tale is based on the legend of a German named von Felkenberg who played dice with the Devil for his soul and lost. A similar Dutch legend tells of Captain van Straaten, and there is also a tale told about Bernard Fokke.

Fokke, skipper of the *Libera Nos*, was renowned for making very fast voyages. Those envious of his supreme navigational skills claimed that he was in league with the Devil, something that Fokke's extreme ugliness and violent temper made all to easy to believe. One day he embarked on a voyage from which he did not return, and it was whispered that the Devil had finally collected his reward.

It is not unlikely that the legend of the Flying Dutchman was born as the result of an actual event – though this would doubtless have been more prosaic than the claiming by the Devil of a human soul. There are many instances of ships being mistakenly abandoned by their crew in the belief that they are about to sink and subsequently staying afloat for days, weeks, months, or even years, following the whim of the wind and tide. The most famous of such ships is the *Mary Celeste* (see page 950), but she is by no means the only one. Perhaps one of the most remarkable stories concerns the wool clipper *Marlborough*, which vanished in 1890 on a voyage between Australia and England. It is said that she was found 23 years later off the coast of Chile. Even if the *Marlborough* story is an exaggeration, it is easy enough to imagine the effect on the minds of superstitious sailors in unfamiliar waters of such a derelict suddenly looming out of the fog.

The Flying Dutchman story has inspired many works of fiction. The American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) wrote of the spectre in *The phantom ship*,

contained in his *Birds of passage*. Edward Fitzball wrote a melodrama called *The flying Dutchman* and the Frenchman August Jal produced the most widely known version of the tale in his *Scènes de la vie maritime*. The German lyric poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), inspired either by Fitzball's melodrama or by an anonymous story *Vanderdecken's message home* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, wrote of the phantom ship in his *Memoiren des Herrn von Schabelwopski*. This in its turn was undoubtedly the inspiration for Wagner's powerful opera *Der fliegende Holländer* ('The flying Dutchman') in which Vanderdecken is allowed ashore once every seven years to find a woman whose love alone can redeem him. Others who have used the theme include Frederick Marryat (*The phantom ship*, 1839) and Sir Walter Scott (*Rokeby*, 1813).

However, the Flying Dutchman is more than mere legend or a piece of fiction. Down the centuries many people have claimed to have seen the phantom. One of the earliest accounts dates from 1702 and the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, an ecclesiastical history of New England by Cotton Mather, a voluminous writer and celebrated Puritan minister. Many of the sightings, however, are difficult if not impossible to substantiate and must therefore be dismissed, albeit reluctantly, as mirages, hallucinations, or visions conjured by over-indulgence in alcohol. One report, though, stands out as exceptional. In 1881 a sighting of the Flying Dutchman's ship was reported by George, Prince of Wales, later King George V, and his elder brother Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence – the same Duke of Clarence who today features among those suspected of being the infamous Jack the Ripper (see page 1290).

The incident is said to have been recorded in the log of the ship HMS *Baccante*. It isn't. It comes from *The cruise of Her Majesties Ship Baccante*, a record of the princes' voyage aboard that ship compiled from their private journals, letters and notebooks by John H. Dalton. At the time of the sighting the princes were aboard another ship in the fleet, the *Inconstant*, having been transferred there when the *Baccante* developed rudder trouble. The account reads:

> June 11th., 1881, – At 4 a.m. the 'Flying Dutchman' crossed our bows. A strange red light as of a phantom ship all aglow in the midst of which light the masts, spars, and sails of a brig 200-yards [180 metres] distant stood out in strong relief as she came up on our port bow. The lookout man on the forecastle reported her as close on the port bow, where also the officer of the watch from the bridge clearly saw her, as did also the quarterdeck midshipman, who was sent forward at once to the forecastle, but on arriving there no vestige or sign whatsoever of material ship was seen either near or right away on the horizon, the night being clear, the sea calm. Thirteen persons altogether saw her, but whether it was van Demien of the 'Flying Dutchman' or what else must remain unknown.
>
> The *Tourmaline* and *Cleopatra*, who were sailing on our starboard bow, flashed to ask whether we had seen the strange red light.
>
> At 10.45 a.m. the ordinary seaman who had this morning reported the 'Flying Dutchman' fell from the top-galant foretopmast crosstrees and was

The ancient tale of the Flying Dutchman ranks among the most famous legends of the sea. Its fascination is as strong as ever; an updated version appeared in the 1951 movie *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (top), with James Mason as the Dutchman and Ava Gardner as the woman he loved before he was condemned to sail the seas for eternity. And 1975 saw a BBC production of the traditional story, with Norman Bailey as the Dutchman (above)

Left: an illustration by Gregory Robinson for Rudyard Kipling's poem *Seven seas*: 'We saw the Dutchman plunging/Full canvas head to wind'. The story of the Flying Dutchman has inspired many other authors, including Henry Longfellow and Heinrich Heine

Below: Porthcurno Cove, Cornwall, England, the site of hauntings by a well-known phantom ship – the black, square-rigged *Goblin*. The ship heads for shore and then glides for some time over dry land before disappearing

> smashed to atoms. At 4.15 p.m. after quarters we hove to with the headyards back, and he was buried at sea. He was a smart royal yardman and one of the most promising young hands in the ship, and everyone feels quite sad at his loss. At the next port we came to the Admiral was also smitten down.

Around 13 people aboard the *Inconstant* plus an unspecified number of people aboard the *Tourmaline* and *Cleopatra* saw the spectre, though whether it was the Flying Dutchman's ship or another spectre must in the princes' words 'remain unknown'. But true to the legend, death followed the sighting.

Nazis face the spectre

One of the most unexpected sources of a report of the Flying Dutchman's ship is that said to have been made by Karl Dönitz, commander-in-chief of the German navy and, briefly, successor to Adolf Hitler. He is said to have seen the spectral ship while on a tour of duty east of Suez and to have claimed later that his men would rather face the combined might of the Allied fleet than know again the terror of seeing the Flying Dutchman's ship.

The Flying Dutchman's ship is far from the only spectre of the sea. In 1949 it was estimated that there were more than 100 'well-established' cases of vessels haunting the north-east coast of the United States alone.

America's most famous ghost ship is probably the *Palatine*, the subject of a famous poem by John Greenleaf Whittier. According to the legend, in 1752 a storm swept the *Palatine* aground on the rocks of Block Island, Rhode Island, and the wreck was set alight by fishermen; one passenger, a woman, was trapped and burned alive. Since then the spectre of the flaming ship has been seen countless times (see page 906).

It is difficult to dismiss the evidence that something – the Palatine light, as it is called – has regularly been seen offshore. Further investigation, however, reveals that no such ship was ever wrecked over Block Island. However, detailed research has shown that 14 years earlier, in 1738, the *Princess Augusta*, carrying 350 refugees from the Lower and Upper Palatinate in Germany, *did* meet its end upon the northern shores of Block Island in circumstances similar to those associated with the *Palatine*, and there can be little doubt that this was the basis of the legend. Only one element of the fate of the *Princess Augusta* differs from the legend of the *Palatine* – *Princess Augusta* merely sank, she was not set alight. So, if the spectre seen so often off Block Island is the spectre of *Princess Augusta*, why is the ghost ship seen ablaze?

Another fairly well-known ghost ship is the black, square-rigged *Goblin* reputedly seen many times by residents of Porthcurno

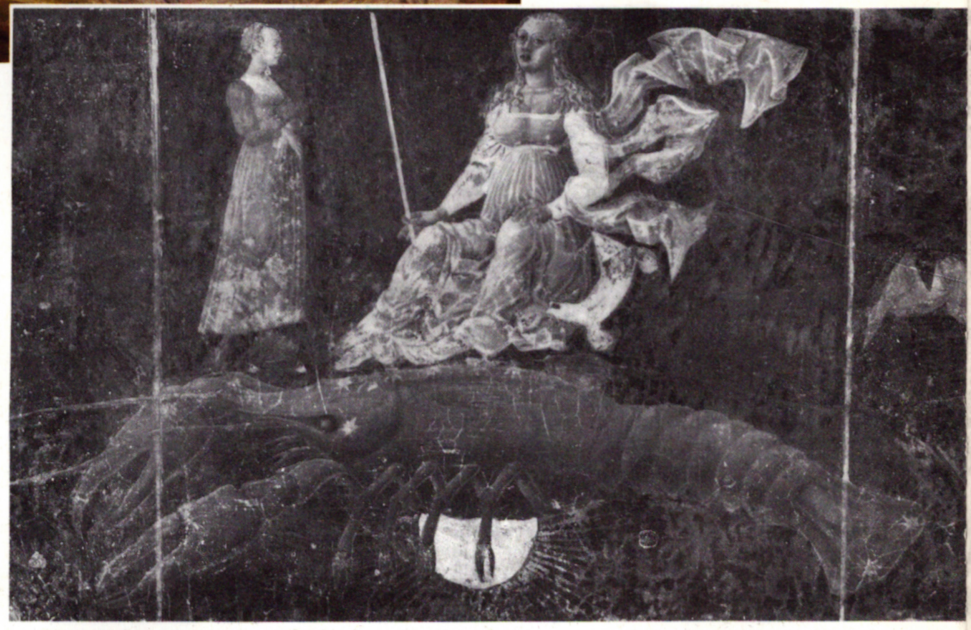
Cove near St Leven, Cornwall, England. This spectre is distinguished by the fact that it is seen to head for shore, then glide for some distance over dry land before vanishing!

What, then, are these ghost ships, these spectres of the sea? They are open to much the same question, speculations and theories as may be applied to ghosts in general. But the Flying Dutchman is different from many ghost and folk tales – sightings have been reported many, many times. If the ship does not exist, what exactly did the princes aboard the *Inconstant* see? Since death or disaster is heralded by a sighting of the Flying Dutchman's ship, perhaps it would be wise not to seek too hard for the answer!

Further reading
Raymond Lamont Brown, *Phantoms, legends, customs and superstitions of the sea*, Patrick Stephens 1972
R. de Witt Miller, *Forgotten mysteries*, Cloud Inc. (Chicago) 1947
Eric Norman, *Weird unsolved mysteries*, Award Books (New York) 1969

The crab, the lion and the virgin

Left: this decoration in the baptistry of Parma Cathedral in Italy shows the tail of the Cancerian crayfish overlying the halo of the archangel Gabriel. Cancer is profoundly connected with birth, and Gabriel is traditionally believed to have been the messenger who told Mary she had been chosen to bear Jesus



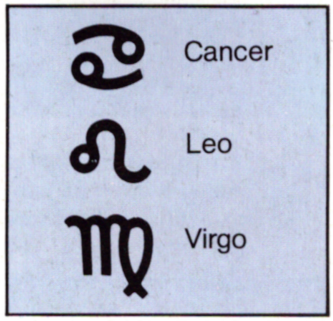
Below: this 15th-century fresco painted in Ferrara clearly shows Cancer as a lobster-like crayfish. This medieval image has become a crab in modern times

The signs of the zodiac encompass a fine mesh of esoteric symbolism reflecting Man's material and spiritual nature. FREDERICK GOODMAN explains the ancient and occult meaning – much of it unused today – of Cancer, Leo and Virgo

THE FOURTH SIGN OF THE ZODIAC, Cancer, has the image of a crab, indicating the watery nature of this, the first of the water signs. At deeper levels of symbolism Cancer is linked with the uterine waters, and hence with the womb, birth and motherhood. This secret symbolism was applied to many different purposes: for example, in horoscopes that were cast to symbolise the creation of the world – the so-called *thema mundi* – Cancer was usually in the ascendant (that is, rising). Since astrologers regard the ascendant as one of the most significant points in a horoscope, Cancer was thus one of the most important elements in the chart associated with the birth of all things.

Cancer's connection with birth was further rooted in an ancient view of the spiritual nature of the world that is now almost entirely foreign to us. It was believed that surrounding the Earth were the spheres of heaven, a series of concentric shells. Each sphere was supposed to be inhabited by spiritual beings and to be 'ruled' by a planet. Each planet was associated with some member of the spiritual hierarchy, more popularly called an angel, an archangel, and so on.

It was further believed that when a spirit came to dwell in a human body at its birth, it passed through each of these spheres, drinking in, as it were, the spiritual forces relating to the planets. The last stage of this descent was through the sphere of the Moon, which was under the guidance of the archangel Gabriel. The Moon rules Cancer, which is why the sign is so intimately connected with prenatal experience.



Above: the modern astrological symbols for the signs of Cancer, Leo and Virgo

A remnant of this idea may be seen in one of the remarkable zodiacal images still preserved in the baptistry of Parma Cathedral, dating from the 13th century. Here Cancer is represented by a crayfish – as in some other medieval zodiacs – and the tail of the crayfish is overlaid on the halo of the archangel Gabriel. This symbolism is especially important in a baptistry, where, through the act of baptism, a new-born child is linked with the spiritual world. This important connection between Gabriel, birth and the soul's prenatal experiences in the Moon's sphere almost certainly explains why Gabriel was appointed to bring to Mary the news of the impending birth of Jesus.

The sign of Cancer is, therefore, linked to both the physical and the spiritual experience of birth. By extension it is also linked with the idea of motherhood. The house of Cancer is still called by astrologers the 'house of the mother' and is said to rule over all domestic matters.

The symbol most frequently used for Cancer in medieval times was not unlike the modern one, but it consisted of two vertical strokes side by side, one with a small circle at its foot, the other with a circle at its head. It may be seen as representing an important idea relating to the innermost nature of the sign. The symbol suggests the idea of upward and downward movement. It is a graphic symbol of vacillation. People born under the sign are noted for their changeability, and the image of the crab is highly pertinent to this aspect of Cancerians, who are liable to dart first to one side, then to the other.

Astrological symbols are often found as decorations on medieval churches. Many of them have undergone great change over the years but Leo, the lion (above, left), has remained the same

A grasping nature

The changeability of Cancerians is largely restricted to their emotional life. By contrast they keep a pincer-like grip on their homes, material possessions and children. This curious stability in a personality that is so vacillating in other respects is associated with the Cancerian tendency to grasp at the past. Childhood is the realm of the Cancerian, for he or she does not easily forget the spiritual realm of the lunar sphere, which immediately preceded earthly life. Gabriel is never far from the Cancerian – as the symbolism of the carving at Parma suggests.

It is possible that the medieval symbol, with its insistence on the contrast of upward and downward movement, also refers to an idea very important in Arabic astrology, which so strongly influenced medieval European thought. In this tradition of astrology, it was insisted that the fixed stars (as opposed to the planets, or 'wandering stars') had a most powerful influence on those zodiacal signs in whose corresponding constellations the stars were located.

Nearly half the 30° arc of Cancer is densely populated by stars, while in the other half they are sparse. Some astrologers therefore claim that it is not sufficient to consider whether, say, the Moon is in Cancer in a natal chart – it is also necessary to consider the Moon's exact degree, or position within the sign. For if there is a star nearby, then a powerful influence for good or evil will enter into the life of that person.

So according to Arabic astrologers there are basically two kinds of Cancerian: those who are linked with a fixed star and those who are on the Earth without such a connection. We can view the medieval symbol of Cancer as a kind of drawing of this important duality, for one of its circles is directed upwards, towards the stars, while the other is directed downwards, towards the Earth. The insight that this symbolises has been almost entirely lost in modern astrology.

Below: Christ in glory over a doorway in Chartres Cathedral, surrounded by the symbols for the four Evangelists; Mark is Leo, Matthew a winged human, John is Scorpio (seen here in its alternative form as an eagle) and Luke is Taurus

Unlike Cancer, Leo has been given the same image – that of a lion – from the very earliest times. Leo is one of the four 'fixed' signs (the other three being Taurus, Scorpio and Aquarius). They are indeed associated with qualities of 'fixity' in the personality: with stubbornness and strength of desire. When in the early centuries of Christianity the ancient symbolism of the zodiac was adapted to the requirements of the new religion, the four fixed signs were adopted to represent the four Evangelists. Taurus represented Luke, Scorpio represented John, Aquarius represented Matthew and Leo represented Mark.

This important symbolism is used in many cathedrals to express teachings and traditions concerning the Sun – a symbol of Christ. Since Leo is ruled by the Sun, the lion is frequently so placed in zodiacs in and on churches that it is the first of the four fixed

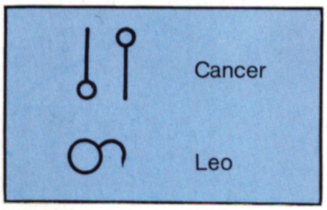
Right: the bull, symbol of St Luke, appears to be the first of the figures on the façade of Orvieto Cathedral in Italy to receive the rays of the rising Sun. However, the bull is looking away from the light at the figure of the Virgin and Child. In fact it is the lion (above) – symbol of Christ the King – that is bathed in the first light each day

signs to receive sunlight each day. In Chartres Cathedral, for example, the four symbols of the Evangelists are ranged around Christ in glory. The lion is the first figure to be lit up by the Sun each day.

Sometimes the symbolism is more profound than this. In Orvieto, in central Italy, the four Evangelist symbols are ranged across the façade of the cathedral; the bull of St Luke is at the southern end, and so receives the light of the Sun first. However, it has its back to the Sun, for its eyes are directed towards the Virgin and Child in the middle of the four figures. It is the lion that first receives the sunlight on its face. This is in perfect accord with the tradition that links Christ (the lion) with the Sun, in much the same way as Gabriel is linked with the Moon.

It has been suggested that the symbol for Leo, which is derived from ancient Greek horoscopes, is a representation of the lion's tail. But it is more likely that it is designed to reflect upon the innermost nature of the Leonine personality. The small circle on the left of the bell-shaped part of the symbol may be visualised as the heart, the 'Sun' that Leo rules at the centre of the human organism.

Below: the medieval symbols for Cancer and Leo. The vertical strokes of Cancer may well symbolise typical Cancerian vacillation, while the circle of Leo seems to represent the human heart, which Leo rules, and the tail may indicate Leo's creative energies

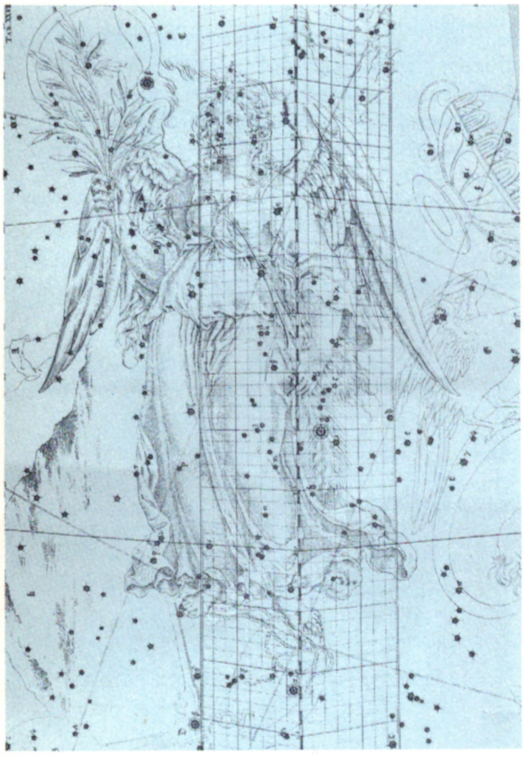


Between Sun and Moon

Mankind is very frequently shown in medieval symbolism between the powers of the Sun and the Moon. One of the most remarkable of such images, making use of extremely subtle symbolism, is on a carved capital in the cathedral of St Pierre, in Geneva, Switzerland. Melchisedec, the Jewish high priest, holds in his right hand the Host (the bread transformed into the body of Christ) and in his left hand the chalice bearing the blood of Christ. His name, carved on the column above, has been slightly changed in form in order to express an astrological idea. The 'M' is carved as a symbol for Leo, and stands over the host. The final letter 'C', separated from the main body of the word, is drawn as a Moon symbol and stands over the chalice. This priest is a symbol of Everyman, who stands between the forces of the Sun and of the Moon. He is linked with the spiritual world through his own blood (the heart of Leo) and the blood of Christ (the liquid in the chalice).

The next sign of the zodiac, Virgo, is closely bound by Christian tradition to the Virgin Mary. The early Christian artists were quick to see the possibility of adapting the picture of a young woman in the starry realm as an image of the Virgin who gave birth to a child from the spiritual realm. Byzantine and Renaissance artists insisted on placing a star on the shoulder or head of the Virgin Mary – a practice that can be understood only in relation to the zodiacal Virgo. The brightest star of the constellation, alpha Virginis, has the traditional name Spica. This means 'ear of corn' and for this reason many images of Virgo show a young maiden

Right: this carving in the cathedral of St Pierre in Geneva, Switzerland, shows the Jewish high priest Melchisedec holding the body (in the form of the transubstantiated Host) and blood of Christ. But it is the subtle carving of the 'M' and 'C' of his name that is of particular significance. The 'M' has become the symbol for Leo (the Sun) and the 'C' is a Moon symbol. Thus the priest is representing humanity balanced between the forces of the Sun and Moon



Left: the brightest star of the constellation of Virgo has the Latin name Spica, which means 'ear of corn' – a fitting symbol for the Christian concept of Christ as bread – spiritual food – with which to feed the world. Many medieval images of the Virgin Mary show her with an ear of corn or even wearing a dress patterned with many ears of corn (right), symbolising Christ and also referring to Spica

Above: the image of the Virgin/Virgo on the frontal of Amiens Cathedral, France, shows her as mediator for mankind, standing between the tree of knowledge, by which men fell, and the 'tree' – the cross – by which mankind was redeemed

holding a corn stalk in her hands. This imagery was well-suited to the Christian symbolists: they saw the corn as an image of Christ, who was to be the 'bread' that fed the world. Just as the Virgo of the constellations held an ear of corn, so the Virgin of the artists held the child Jesus. Some pictures of the Virgin Mary actually portray her with the ear of corn, or with many ears of corn covering her dress.

Another strain of Christian symbolism is found in pictures of the Virgin holding a distaff. This is a reference to one of the gospels of the Apocrypha, which relates how Mary was spinning wool when the archangel Gabriel came to her with the news of her coming child. When the inner meanings of the ear of corn and of the distaff were lost, painters and sculptors showed Mary holding a flower. No doubt this was intended to represent the flowering of youthful virginity.

The figure of Virgo on Amiens Cathedral is holding what may be corn. Its identity is not of the greatest importance, however, for the deepest symbolism in this carving is to be found in the fact that the maiden stands between two trees – the trees by which mankind fell and was redeemed. In one tree dwells the serpent who tempted Eve, while the other tree represents the 'tree' – the cross – on which Jesus died. This Virgo is an image of Mary, the mother of Christ, standing as an earthly mediator between the two trees.

In the cathedral at Chartres the arrangement of the zodiacal figures is unusually rich in symbolism. However, there is a special significance to the positioning of the image of Virgo. The figure is made prominent by being placed at the very top of the pointed arch, together with the archer Sagittarius, which is a military symbol. The cathedral is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and, according to esoteric tradition, was financed by the military order of the Knights Templar. Thus this curious juxtaposition of Virgo and Sagittarius, which are widely separated in the zodiac, summarises the founding and dedication of the cathedral.

The symbol for Virgo is often explained as being derived from the letters MV, for Maria Virgo. Another suggestion is that it is derived from a picture of three ears of corn in an upright position. But its true derivation can be understood only after we have dealt with the derivation of the symbolism of Scorpio.

Below: Virgo and Sagittarius are found in juxtaposition over this arch in Chartres Cathedral; the church is dedicated to the Virgin, and the archer represents the Knights Templar, who financed its building

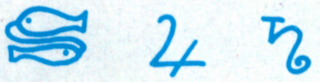
The symbolic meanings of Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius are revealed on page 2214

White symbols–black arts?

Generation after generation of Italians living in the old structures known as *trulli* have decorated their roofs with symbols painted in white. FREDERICK GOODMAN looks into the mystery of their age and significance

THE UNUSUAL TRULLI of Puglia in southern Italy are the more fascinating because of the white symbols on their distinctive conical roofs – the 'towers' that give the structures their name. And these symbols have been painted on by the trulli dwellers over generations. But there is some doubt as to whether the symbols are as old as is often suggested.

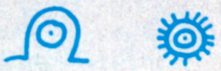
For example, certain of the symbols used for the signs of the zodiac and planets are far from ancient, those representing Pisces, Saturn and Jupiter being:



These forms were adopted widely only some time after the invention of printing in Europe in the mid 15th century. The older symbols for these three examples are:

The fact is that none of these early symbols are found on the trulli; there are only modern ones.

Similarly, if the trulli symbols really were derived from very early sources, the Sun symbols would be different. The most common ones on the trulli roofs are:



The first of these is the image of the Sun within the Greek letter omega and the second is the 'double Sun'. But none of the trulli roofs bear the much earlier symbol:

which dates from at least the 8th century.

Above: the symbol for the planet Venus is one of the genuinely old markings on the trulli roofs. It can be traced back to pre-Christian Greek horoscopes

Below: a vista of the little town of Alberobello in southern Italy presents a charming picture. The intriguing symbols on the trulli roofs have attracted scholarly interest as well as tourists

This curious form was derived from two of the Greek letters in the word 'sun'.

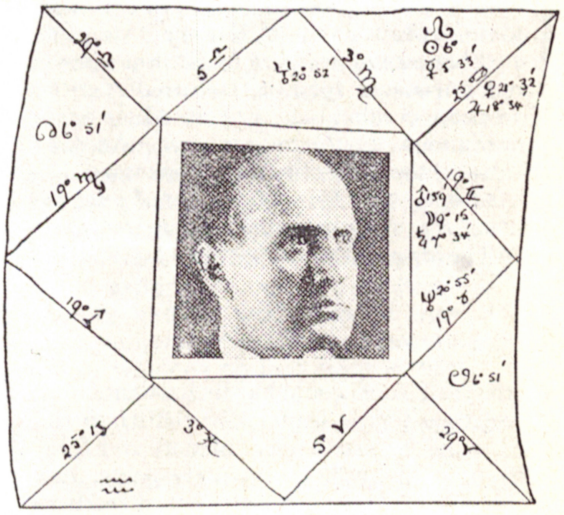
The symbol for the planet Venus:

is very old, being traceable to pre-Christian Greek horoscopes. This symbol, which does appear on one or two trulli, is still much used by modern astrologers and has been adopted by biologists to represent 'female'. But the occasional use of a genuinely ancient symbol does not make a case for the antiquity of all of them.

There has been much speculation on the origin and purpose of many of the trulli signs. Some writers have even gone to the length of claiming that a number of the symbols are derived from satanic sources and are linked to black magic and diabolic rites. Those who make such claims indicate that they are unfamiliar with the history of symbolism. An example of this is the writer who traced a direct connection between the swastikas on the trulli and the dark god Moloch, to whom small children were sacrificed in the pre-Christian era. The swastika is one of the most widespread symbols in the world, connected essentially with a solar or cosmic mysticism. It could have no relationship with Moloch – just as it originally had none with the Nazis, who gave it a diabolic connotation.

It can be said with certainty that not one of the surviving trulli symbols is directly linked with the thousands of sigils derived from magical scripts, secret alphabets, black magic symbolism and the profusion of symbols contained in diabolic and occult treatises. One serious scholar of symbolism pointed out in 1940 that the greater number of the trulli signs are Christian, others being 'pagan, astrological, as well as floral and geometric'. Keeping in mind that the floral and geometric symbols are themselves possessed of special meanings, though sometimes still unexplained, then this would appear to be a fair summary of the scope of the trulli symbolism.

The ignominious end of the Italian dictator Mussolini (above) and the horoscope that predicted it (right). The trulli of Alberobello were specially painted for Il Duce's visit in 1934 – and some of the astrological symbols could be read as a sly snub to the leader



Below: one of the Christian interpretations of the pierced heart symbol is that it represents the wounded heart of the Virgin Mary

Pagan symbols are doubtlessly found on the trulli. The clearest example is of relatively recent usage, however: it is the double V (see page 2139), the standard symbol for the Italian Fascist movement. This naturally figured large in the series of symbols painted in welcome to Mussolini on his visit to the Puglian town of Alberobello in 1934.

Curiously, this pagan symbol had a special significance, though it became evident to non-occultists only in retrospect. This significance hinges on the fact that the Fascist symbol is virtually an inverted M, the first letter of Mussolini's name. After Mussolini had been shot by Italian partisans in April 1945, his body was hung upside down in the streets of Milan, an object of ridicule – the

The custom of painting symbols on the trulli roofs seems to be dying out, as shown by this photograph of Alberobello taken in the early 1980s

man inverted like his initial M. Only an occultist would have seen the full implication of this, for it was well-known in occult circles that a violent end had been predicted for the dictator. The English astrologer who worked under the pseudonym of 'Raphael' had published his commentary on Mussolini's horoscope as early as 1932: he had predicted the European conflict, as well as Mussolini's ignominious death by violence. Another symbol in the Mussolini horoscope is cited as a further presage of violence representing the 'revolutionary' planet Uranus.

Whoever painted the symbol for Saturn:

on the trulli roofs could hardly have intended a welcome to the leader, for Saturn is the darkest of the astrological planets and foretells of great evil. In some respects, this seemingly innocent symbol points directly to the interfering hand of the tourist board, for two such symbols appear on the trulli specially painted for Mussolini's visit, and both are painted in exactly the same way. There are at least a dozen different ways of drawing the modern symbol for this planet, and so we can surmise that these identical two were copied from a single source. Probably the trulli dwellers who so copied them did not know that they were cocking an occult snook at the Fascist ruler.

The predominance of the cross on the trulli roofs tells us that the majority of the symbols are of Christian origin. This has tended to influence the interpretation of their meanings. M.L.T. Verardi, an Italian sociologist who made a careful study of the trulli, put much emphasis on this Christian element, and consequently he often missed the occult element where it did exist. For example, he read the significance of the symbol for Uranus:

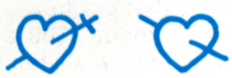
in Christian terms, insisting that the top part was derived from the first two letters of the standard form IHS, a contraction of Jesus, and that the bottom part represented Christ resting triumphant on the globe of the world. In fact, this is a standard symbol of Uranus, the H being derived from the initial of its discoverer, Sir William Herschel. However, had Verardi examined one of the trulli 'Uranus' symbols more closely, he would have seen that the painter had put a dot in the centre of the circle. This changes the meaning considerably, and carries it into the realm of occultism. This symbol and its variant:

which also appears on a trullo, are actually the common symbolic forms for the planetary spirit of the Sun, named Och in the medieval occult manuscripts. Each of the seven planetary spirits, and the related planetary angels, have symbols attached to them, and are also derived from the medieval lore of symbolism, yet this Och symbol is the only one that has found its way onto the roof of a trullo.

Verardi also allowed his preoccupation with Christian symbolism to colour his interpretation of the symbol:

This has been on the same trullo since the late 1960s and has been repainted at least once. Earlier photographs, made during the period of Verardi's study (he died in the 1950s), show a slight distortion of the sign, but on the whole the form has been preserved by the trullo owner with a fair exactness. Now, for some reason, Verardi traced the form of this symbol to an intertwined heart, a specifically Christian symbol. This is a most unlikely interpretation – but the precise significance of the symbol does remain unknown. It is possible that it is a truncated phi symbol, or it could possibly be based on a 16th-century alchemical symbol used to denote gold, the object of the alchemical search.

Curiously, the pierced-heart symbols:



said by some to be the wounded heart of the Mother of God and by others to be the heart of Jesus transfixed by the lance of the Roman Longinus, seem to be disappearing from the trulli roofs. Pictures taken at the end of the 1960s clearly show such symbols, but these same trulli roofs were bare in the early 1980s.

Will the tradition of painting symbols on the trulli of Puglia die out before the enigma of their exact origin and history is solved? It would be a pity if this were to happen.

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
One day when I was about eight years old and having my hair put into ribbons by my mother, a figure suddenly appeared behind her. My mother had her back to the door, which was open, and I could see through it clearly. The figure was dressed in a brownish diver's suit with a kind of breathing tube in his mouth. This tube seemed to be part of the suit and was connected at the waist. His helmet had only a tiny round window. The strangest thing was that he appeared to have only one eye and his face, or features, seemed very small. He just looked at me.

I screamed and the figure disappeared. My mother said that I had imagined it, but I knew I had not. As this happened in around 1938, my mind could not have been coloured by talk of people from other planets because there was very little interest in the subject then, and certainly no pictures of people in space-suits were around.

I have always believed in visitors from space and I think it may be because of this childhood experience, which I know was not a dream.
Yours faithfully,
Doreen Beaney (Mrs) St Leonards, Sussex

Dear Sir,
About March 1979 we moved into a large house that had been built about 1900. It had been made into flats, but we planned to occupy the whole of it.

One evening when we were out with friends we ran into the brother of one of them, who came back with the others for coffee. The following day, this brother told my friend that, as he was leaving, he saw an old man in a tweed jacket standing at the bottom of the stairs on the ground floor. (We were still living upstairs until the rest of the house was habitable.) My guest nodded to the old man because he thought he lived in the ground-floor flat. We didn't think much about the incident, though we discussed it a little. We dismissed the idea of a ghost, thinking that our guest may have had too much to drink, or even that a man had walked in from the street because we didn't keep the door locked.

The next incident occurred some time later. My brother-in-law came to pick up his wife around 9 p.m. while I was still at work. (I am a police constable.) He was pale and shaking when he arrived upstairs. He has had psychic encounters in the past, and he said that the hallway was strangely icy. I got home about an hour later and my brother-in-law and I checked to see if the back door or a window was open, but there was nothing that could have created a draught.

Then in October 1980 a third incident occurred, and it changed how we felt about the house. Six of us were spending the evening at my house and about 11 p.m., one of my friends – another policeman – went to the toilet along the landing, passing the stairs to the next floor. Looking up, he saw an old man wearing a dark suit slowly walking up the stairs. He couldn't see the man's face, but he felt he was old by the way he moved. He thought it was a friend of the lodger we had at the time. His wife also saw the old man through the glass door and window of the lounge, which gives a clear view of the landing. On his return to the room, they talked to each other about it and discovered that she had seen the very same figure. Knowing of the previous incidents, they said nothing at the time, but told us the next day. This time we decided they must have seen a ghost, because we would all have been able to see a real person if he had walked past the glass door.

Although I have an open mind about paranormal phenomena, we thought it best to move out of the house.
Yours faithfully,
(*Name and address supplied*)

Dear Sir,
After reading your articles on Uri Geller [issues 32, 34 and 35], I just have to write to tell you of my experience with his 'powers'.

In November 1973 Geller was being interviewed on radio and told the listeners to find any watches or clocks that didn't work and he would try to fix them.

It just so happened that we had a clock that wasn't working and would cost too much' to fix, and for interest's sake, my father followed Geller's instructions. As far as I can recall, everyone was told to put the item between their hands and concentrate on it becoming functional. Geller said a few quiet and soothing words and then said that most clocks should be working. Our clock was not, however, so we put it back in the rear of a cupboard and went to bed.

We were all suddenly woken at midnight when the clock began to chime, even though it had not been wound. It worked for a number of days, keeping good time, and then stopped again. Now it works only for a minute or two when wound up, but it chimes perfectly.

Because of this experience, we are all firm believers in Uri Geller and we would like to know if anybody else can remember a similar experience with their clocks or watches on that night in 1973.
Yours faithfully,
Paul M. Vates Leeds, Yorkshire

Many people have reported similar effects when Uri Geller has appeared on radio and television with this particular request. Possibly some of the ancient or discarded watches and clocks thus revived were affected by paranormal means. On the other hand, the change in temperature brought about by handling a disused timepiece for a few minutes will usually make it tick – if only for a little while. For some people, that constitutes sufficient evidence of Geller's psychokinetic power, even though making a clock tick is not necessarily the same as making it actually work. In an experiment conducted in the United States during one of Geller's visits there, a telephone poll established that some 40 per cent of those who had responded to Geller's request had had a successful result – that is, their clocks ticked for a while. Random sampling of non-respondents, who were able to bring an inert watch to the telephone for a few minutes (with no suggestion of paranormality at work), produced a higher *rate of success. None of which bodes terribly well for the efficacy of Mr Geller. We suspect that your clock revived to the extent that it did simply because it was moved, possibly dislodging some dirt in the mechanism or causing some other minor adjustment. Sorry to be so sceptical!*

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES – 41
Dwarfie stane, Hoy, Orkneys